
**Thomas Jefferson to James Monroe, May 22, 1801, from
Thomas Jefferson and James Monroe Correspondence,
Transcribed and Edited by Gerard W. Gawalt,
Manuscript Division, Library of Congress**

Thomas Jefferson to James Monroe

Washington May 22. 1801

Dear Sir

I am late in answering your favor of the 4th because the navy department from an extraordinary press of business could not till within this day or two furnish me the inclosed papers. You will see by them that the money for Gosport (12,000) has been placed in Norfolk at Mr. Hopkins's command ever since the last week in January. Why it should have been withheld so long he will probably explain to you.

As to the mode of correspondence between the General & particular executives I do not think myself a good judge. Not because my position gives me any prejudice on the occasion; for if it be possible to be certainly conscious of any thing I am conscious of feeling no difference between writing to the highest or lowest being on earth; but because I have ever thought that forms should yield to whatever should facilitate business. Comparing the two governments together it is observable tht in all those cases where the independent or reserved rights of the states are in question the two Executives if they are to act together must be exactly co-ordinate; they are, in those cases, each the supreme head of an independent government. Such is the case in the beginning of this letter where

Library of Congress

the two executives were to treat de pair en pair. In other cases, to wit, those transferred by the constitution to the general government, the general executive is certainly preordinate- e.g. in a question respecting the militia, and others easily to be recollected. Were there therefore to be a stiff adherence to etiquette, I should say that in the former cases the correspondence should be between the two heads & that in the latter the Governor must be subject to receive orders from the war department as any other subordinate officer would. And were it observed that either party set up unjustifiable pretensions, perhaps the other might in opposing them by a tenaciousness of his own rigorous right. But I think the practice in Genl. Washington's administration was most friendly to business and was absolutely equal.

Some times he wrote to the Governors, & sometimes the heads of departments wrote. If a letter is to be on a general subject, I see not season why the President should not write: but if it is to go into details these being known only to the head of the department, it is better he should write directly, otherwise the correspondence must involve circuities. If this be practised promiscuously in both classes of cases, each party setting examples of neglecting etiquette, both will stand on equal ground, and convenience alone will dictate through whom any particular communication is to be made. All the governors have freely corresponded with the heads of departments except Hancock who refused it. But his legislature took advantage of a particular case which justified them in interfering, and they obliged him to correspond with the head of a department. Genl. Washington sometimes wrote to them. I presume Mr. Adams did, as you mention his having written to you. On the whole I think a free correspondence best and shall never hesitate to write myself to the governors even in a federal case where the occasion presents itself to me particularly.

Accept assurances of my sincere & constant affection & respect. Th. Jefferson

FC (Jefferson Papers, Library of Congress).